



CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

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WAXMAN ATTACKS REAGAN ADMINISTRATION BID FOR SECRECY IN HHS DECISION MAKING

Congressman Henry A. Waxman (D-Los Angeles), Chairman of the House Health and Environment Subcommittee, today charged the Reagan Administration with shutting the public out of the Department of Health and Human Services decision making affecting Medicaid, Medicare, Headstart, SSI, AFDC, and dozens of other crucial public benefit programs.

In a letter to Richard Schweiker, Secretary of HHS, Waxman attacked a Department proposal which would permit itself, without judicial review, to deprive the public of the right to comment on proposed agency regulations before they become final.

Waxman, long a champion of these HHS-administered programs and of open government, accused the Reagan Administration of hypocrisy, "First, it sought office clamoring for greater federal agency accountability and responsiveness. Now, after obtaining office, it proposes to exclude the public from review of critical program policy decisions."

The proposed change, if adopted, will adversely affect, not only the poor, and aged, but, also hospitals, doctors, nursing homes, businesses, unions, social service agencies, and financial institutions.

"Perhaps as importantly," Waxman predicted, "this change will adversely affect the department. If adopted, it will only serve to heap discredit on HHS. Since the adoption in 1971 of the original policy of permitting public comment, many major Department rules have undergone substantial revisions between their proposed and final stages largely as a result of information received during the public comment process."

"By depriving itself of this essential information, the agency will make embarrassing mistakes, its vital programs will suffer, and the poor and aged will lose. As usual, on bottom line, the taxpayer pays."

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